

ARTIE SHAW

The Complete Rhythm Makers Sessions

1937-1938

Volume II



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CD One

New York City July 12, 1937.

1. Whispers In The Dark (2.57)
2. Don't Ever Change (3.10)
3. If I Put My Heart In A Song (2.53)
4. Love Is A Merry-Go-Round (3.16)
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Total Time: 61.45

CD Two

New York City, October 17, 1937.

1. A Strange Loneliness (3.59)
2. Have You Met Miss Jones? (2.26)
3. I'd Rather Be Right (2.14)
4. Everything You Said Came True (3.58)
5. Rosalie (2.32)
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20. It's A Long Way To Tipperary (2.40)

Total time: 59.14

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JAZZ BAND

COMPACT CLASSIC



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We left our hero in volume one clinging by his fingertips at the Capitol Theater in Washington DC, where he had opened in May 1937 without a scrap of music on the stand. The book straggled in on a separate bus three quarters of the way through the first show, during which time the band played from memory or simply jammed. Being a new band unburdened by the expectations of familiarity or obliged to render a medley of hits, the audience apparently was none the wiser. Before the band returned for its next transcription session on July 12, Shaw and his men had plenty of time to woodshed in the hinterlands, first a month in Oakmont, Pennsylvania just northeast of Pittsburgh on the Allegheny River; then another month in Wildwood, New Jersey. It was during the New Jersey engagement that the band slipped into New York during July and recorded the third batch of Rhythm Makers sides.

He had come a long way. In October 1936 John Hammond saw the first Shaw band when it opened at New York's French Casino and painted a grim picture of it's prospects. "Shaw seemed to have done well at the Lexington," Hammond said, "but his spotting at the French Casino seems to me a particularly ill-advised piece of booking since Artie's band need an intimate room and a congenial audience if it is to have any commercial appeal... The people come for the show; the band, unless it is the loudest in captivity, can make no impression." Shaw would soon take Hammond's counsel to heart but for the moment he survived taking what he regarded as the high road above the swing craze. It was typical of the way in which Shaw tended to define himself in opposition to others. It wasn't the first time.

He had taken up the clarinet in New Haven, CT, when he was 12, only to have his teacher give up on him after a few months of lessons – not because he was too slow, but too fast. "Why should I go on," the instructor said. "He already plays better than I do." Shaw took quick command of the clarinet and went on to play in a high school band that included Billy Berman, brother of Sonny Berman. Both Bermans would die young, Billy at 16 in an accident; Sonny, at 22 of a heart attack. Shaw's father left the family in Artie's freshman high school year, leaving him and his dressmaker mother to make do. Shaw never came close to finishing New Haven High. An argument with his music teacher sent him off and running at 15, only to end up stranded in Nashville. Returning home, he worked gigs in the New Haven area before winning a trip to Hollywood in a lottery when he was 18.

In California he joined Irving Aaronson's Commanders and met Tony Pestritto, a.k.a., Tony Pastor, for the first time. There was more travelling around the country

with this band before he arrived in New York shortly after the Great Depression began to settle over the country but in the early '30s the depression was the least of his problems. On October 15, 1930, while driving up Broadway, he struck and killed a pedestrian in a terrible accident at 91st Street, then drove on, unaware that he had hit anybody but witnesses noted his license number and the police promptly arrested him. Bail confined Shaw to the New York area and kept him off the road at a time when he needed money badly. He was held on manslaughter charges and thrown into a legal system where lawyer's fees drained not only his own resources but his mother's as well. After four years and thousands of dollars, Shaw was cleared when the court determined the accident was the fault of the victim but it had taught him what living poor was all about.

Meanwhile, Shaw took what jobs he could get, few of which had any connection to jazz or music. He sought stimulation in literature and took formal study at Columbia University. At one point he went into a literary retreat down in Bucks County, PA. with his first wife Margie (an earlier under-age marriage had been annulled) and lived what he called "a double life" in the backwoods along the Delaware, trying to write while financing his rural life with his music. Then came the famous Imperial Theater concert and his Interlude in B Flat in May 1936, and suddenly the momentum and publicity were in place for him to launch his career as a bandleader.

Given the depression and the protracted personal expenses he endured fighting the civil suit over the 1930 accident, financial security was not something he took lightly. He had compartmentalized his life to the point where he was reconciled to the notion that while music might put food on the table, it would not add sustenance to his soul. So he would use the former to subsidize the latter.

To what extent that first band with strings was offering sustenance to Shaw can, I suppose, be argued. "We were bucking a tide," he admitted to Leonard Feather in 1951, "a tide that was impossible to beat – the chewing gum drummers and the loud swing fanaticism....We needed a band that was flexible enough for theaters, one-nighters and hotel rooms." Perhaps in an odd way, Shaw believed that by offering a band centered on a string section, he was standing firm against what he saw as the vulgarity of swing and pioneering a more refined alternative. More likely he was simply trying to find what worked without turning into an imitation of Benny Goodman. That band, with three brass, one sax and four strings (heard on the first

20 tunes of Volume 1 (JAZZBAND TMCD 2190/91-2), played the Paramount Theater in December 1936 with Eddie Condon sitting in on guitar. Shaw later recalled that Condon could barely read music, didn't know what the repeat sign meant on the score, and thus finished most charts a minute or two ahead of the band.

The band traveled south to Dallas after the first of the year, then to New Orleans, and finally back to New York where it opened at the Meadowbrook in New Jersey on February 19, 1937. It would be the last stand for this first attempt by Shaw as a band. It dissolved with the close of the engagement on March 9, along with the Shaw's strategy of succeeding with a genteel dance orchestra of strings in the middle of the swing era. A month later he would re-emerge with a more conventional brass-and-reed combination, the core of which continues on this CD.

It was during the Meadowbrook stand that these NBC sides were recorded under the generic name the Rhythm Makers. The Rhythm Makers charade was a fairly transparent one, however, since enough of the arrangements had been, or would soon be, commercially recorded under Shaw's name on Brunswick to remove any possibility of anonymity but nobody seemed to give it that much thought.

Least of all Shaw, for whom much of material on the present July session may have seemed a bit tedious and driven by the pressure of song publishers, who then represented the main center of power in the music business. He once told me that his relations with record executives and producers were relatively pleasant; it was the song pluggers who gave him his biggest problems. It was like betting on horses. Fear of missing the boat on what every publisher promised would be the next "sure thing" could be disorienting to his best musical instincts. Of the 20 tunes from the July session, nine feature Peg LaCentra (not Betty Lowther, who was credited on *Swingdom* LP issues in 1986) and all are just slightly to one side or the other of the same mid level dance tempo, as if conforming to a fairly rigid formula. The contrast between these sides and the ones laid down in April reflect a somewhat more polished ensemble finish, particularly in the sax section but the repertoire is drawn primarily from contemporary sources and intended to be timely. Were it not for the presence of Shaw himself, they would only be of marginal interest.

"Whispers in the Dark" was then being introduced in the movie *Artists and Models* and is a pleasant instrumental. "Don't Ever Change" was a pop tune of the time of no particular pedigree. "If I Put My Heart in a Song" is a forgotten ballad bearing no relationship to the more famous Irving Berlin tune, "I Poured My Heart into a Song",

introduced in 1939 in the Rudy Vallee film *Second Fiddle*. "Love Is a Merry Go Round" is a second tier early Johnny Mercer piece recorded around this time by Bunny Berigan and Charlie Barnet.

"The Moon Got in My Eyes," "It's the Natural Thing to Do" and "All You Want to Do Is Dance" were early collaborations between composer Johnny Burke and Bing Crosby, all from the Paramount movie *Double or Nothing*. Whatever fame the first two continue to have is mostly due to Mildred Bailey's recordings with Ed Hall, Buck Clayton and a group from the Basie band. "Dance" is just a tad slow to really swing. The Tommy Dorsey Clambake Seven gave it the kick it needed on its Victor record of the period but Shaw's renderings are smoothly and lightly buoyant.

Introduced by Irene Dunne in the underrated Paramount musical *High Wide and Handsome*, "The Folks Who Live on the Hill", "Can I Forget You?" and "The Things I Want" came with the creative credentials of Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern, whose daughter, Elizabeth, Shaw would wed in five years. The film, if not quite the score, also anticipated Hammerstein's 1943 blockbuster *Oklahoma* with its 19th century rural setting and its seamless integration of story and song.

"Posin'" is an effortlessly relaxed instrumental that reminds us how the Shaw band could swing. "If You Should Ever Leave Me" was a period pop tune recorded by Mildred Bailey, Tommy Dorsey, Ella Fitzgerald and even Fletcher Henderson (who also recorded "Posin'" at the same session.) "The Loveliness of You" and "Afraid to Dream" came from the 1937 film *You Can't Have Everything* with Alice Faye (who sang "Dream"), Tony Martin (who introduced "Loveliness"), and Louise Hovick, who would soon change her name to Gypsy Rose Lee. Shaw recorded "Afraid to Dream" commercially for Brunswick 10 days later.

The July session wound down by breaking format, reaching back a few years and giving us the recognizable signature of Artie Shaw arranging touch. Irving Berlin's 1923 "All Alone" swings from the first note with a vamping counter melody, probably concocted by Shaw, that one wishes had continued behind Shaw as he plays the first chorus. Using a similar countermelody introduction on "If I Had You", the obbligato continues effectively under the brass. The 1929 Ted Shapiro tune (said to be a favorite of Edward VIII) is one that Shaw would return to again in commercial recordings for Victor in 1938 and 1941. Benny Goodman would make it his own as well and it would also come to acquire the emotional poignancy of a lovely wartime love story when it turned up as a major element in MGM's *The Clock* with Judy Garland in 1944.

"Because I Love You" and "Together" continue the Berlin theme, the latter with the chart that would become familiar to Shaw fans after 1954 with the LP issue of the Hotel Lincoln/Café Rouge air checks by Victor. The same for "Just You, Just Me", neither of which Shaw recorded commercially.

Less than a week after these transcriptions were completed, the band appeared on CBS's Saturday Night Swing Club. The latter part of the summer was spent on the road hopping from one one-nighter after another, when they could be booked, but despite the recordings for Brunswick and occasional broadcasts, the band was not generating great excitement. Max Kaminsky replaced Johnny Best on trumpet around the first of October and later wrote that Shaw seemed both artistically and financially stalled. "Most of his men were beginners," he said. "It was a very immature band at the start with no definite style." As lead player, he said, he was "struggling with the book and trying to get the band to play on pitch."

It's worth noting that at this particular time Shaw's reputation as a clarinetist was considerably more widespread than his standing as a band leader. The case in point: as the band gathered in New York for the next transcription date on October, Down Beat Magazine was taking in the votes for its second annual readers poll. When the results were published in January 1938 Shaw came in second to Benny Goodman, posting 363 votes to Goodman's 1866. He may have been a distant second, but he topped Jimmy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Barney Bigard and all the others of the period. The Shaw band, however, placed 14th with 115 votes to the Goodman orchestra's 2565. Moreover, none of Shaw's Brunswick records appeared on the Down Beat year's best list; and Tom Herrick, who provided monthly reviews of worthy arrangements (and who continues to play a mellow Bobby Hackett oriented trumpet in Arizona), never picked up the Shaw band on his radar in 1937.

The October transcriptions present some significant and welcome differences from July. Shaw's new vocalist, Dolores O'Neill (not, according to Shaw discographer Vladimir Simosko, Louise Farrell as credited on the Swingdom LPs), is heard on only one cut. Though her serene sound is a considerable improvement on LaCentra's more weighty earnestness, it's the far hipper, more tongue-in-cheek jocularly of Tony Pastor that enlivens the singing on five cuts, leaving fourteen instrumentals for the band.

Perhaps the oblique, almost brooding melody of "A Strange Loneliness", with its penchant for sidestepping expectations, appealed to Shaw, who officially introduced

it (at a slightly brighter tempo) on a Brunswick recording made five days after this one.

The next two numbers, "Have You Met Miss Jones?" and "I'd Rather Be Right", come from the Rodgers and Hart FDR parody of 1937, *I'd Rather Be Right* starring George M. Cohan as Roosevelt. The seldom-heard title tune generates some fine soloing from Shaw (presaging hints of Benny Goodman's "Kingdom of Swing" in 1939) and proves a solid basis for jazz treatment.

This is the famous seventh "Rosalie", which composer Cole Porter so despised and which critic Alec Wilder roundly dismissed with a curt "it has nothing to recommend it." Well, not quite so fast. The show *Rosalie* actually originated on Broadway in 1928 with a score by Sigmund Romberg and George Gershwin (that included "How Long Has This Been Going On) but when MGM made the second film version in 1937 (a previous version in 1930 had not been released), it turned to Cole Porter for a new score. He labored hard over the key title song, rejecting five versions before finally submitting a sixth to the studio but Louis B. Mayer considered Porter's choice too high brow. So "Rosalie" #6 came finally back as the minimal "Rosalie" #7, a simple chromatic descent down the keys, white and black. Shaw's famous version, with Pastor's great vocal, refuses to take any of it seriously and thus manages to deliver goods Porter had probably not imagined. He would later record a version for Victor. The bright "I've a Strange New Rhythm in My Heart" was also part of the Porter *Rosalie* score, introduced by Eleanor Powell in a tap dance number.

The band gives a preview of the faintly remembered "You Have Everything", which would come to Broadway in the Jack Buchanan show *Between the Devil* in late December. The solo and arrangement are typical of Shaw's emerging taste for clear and unadorned performance of top scale show songs.

"Shindig" sounds like Artie Shaw imitating Larry Clinton. The easy, loping tempo puts no strain on anybody's resources, except perhaps, given the length, one's patience. Pastor comes back for a mock football march in "Sweet Varsity Sue", which would have been a natural for *Dancing Co-ed*, Shaw's 1939 college movie. It alternately struts and swings. Maybe you'll agree that "I Want a New Romance" sounds vaguely similar to "Captain Custard," which Bob Hope and Bing Crosby would sing in *Road to Singapore* in 1940.

"Shoot the Likker to Me, John Boy" of course, is the famous Shaw showpiece, already recorded for Brunswick that would become the basis for his first short film,

Class in Swing in 1939 where it acquired a series of call and response figures between Shaw and the band presented as ad lib jamming but clearly less than spontaneous. "Free Wheeling" and "S.O.S." are two more originals (the former just recorded) that shows the band at its best and Shaw playing at the level that soon would take him to the top.

Down Beat's Paul Eduard Miller reviewed the Brunswick versions of "How Dry I Am" and "Sweet Adeline" (released back to back) in the September 1937 issue and found them "smooth and swiny with several well-oiled choruses by clarinetist Shaw," but otherwise without apparent consequence. I beg to differ. The former 1920s prohibition lament (adapted in the 20's from an 1891 traditional hymn called "Happy Day") is stripped and shaped into the kind of clean riff tune such as "Back Bay Shuffle" that would soon become a defining part of the Shaw oeuvre. "Adeline", which dates from 1903 and was used by John "Honey" Fitzgerald, maternal grandfather to John F. Kennedy, in his 1906 Boston mayoral campaign, is yanked from it's barber shop origins and swings with a totally natural flow. Pastor is perfect on the bluesy (but not a blues) "Black and Blue" he follows most clearly in the footsteps of Louis Armstrong. Shaw's dramatic clarinet summation, while patterned on Armstrong bravado trumpet, is quite striking on its own merits.

Another Shaw original, "Fee Fi Fo Fum", is playfully derivative of the kind of charts that Tommy Dorsey was then playing, even down to the Dave Tough-style drum fills. Only Shaw's clarinet brands it otherwise. Shaw must have liked something about "I'm Yours" from 1930. In addition to the Brunswick recording, it can be heard interpolated into his 1940 film *Second Chorus* and was at least recorded for the sound track of *Dancing Co-ed*, though I can't recall hearing it in the film, even as incidental music. (It was released by Rhino Records in a collection of big band soundtracks.)

For the final two the band reaches back to 1860 for Stephen Foster's plantation paradigm "Old Black Joe" and to 1912 for the World War I anthem "It's a Long Way to Tipperary". The latter swings with more buoyancy and lift, but Shaw plays wonderfully on both.

The good cheer, however, did not yet extend to the band's overall prospects. It was not yet reaching a national audience with any regularity, and its travels were generally confined to the Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Massachusetts circuit. As much creative ingenuity was going into getting two nights sleep for the price of one in hotels as the

music. Shaw said later that he was on the verge of giving up several times as 1937 wound down. Only his confidence in the band's growth kept him going.

Once again we leave Artie Shaw hanging by his fingertips. His fortunes would soon reverse dramatically, but for that we must await volume three.

John McDonough
Down Beat, The Wall Street Journal
December 2003

Discographical details from "Artie Shaw: A Musical Biography & Discography" by Vladimir Simosko (with a forward by Artie Shaw) published in 2000 by Scarecrow Press Inc. Lanham, Maryland & London and the Institute for Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, Newark N.J.

Photograph unknown photographer.

Thanks are due to Tony Middleton for his assistance.

Graphics & Layout by D.C. Graphics, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex.

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CD One

Artie Shaw clarinet; John Best, Tom DiCarlo, Malcolm Crain trumpets; George Arus, Harry Rodgers trombones; Les Robinson, Hank Freeman altos; Tony Pastor, Fred Petry tenors; Les Burness piano; Al Avola guitar; Ben Ginsberg bass; Cliff Leeman drums; Peg LaCentra vocals. RCA Studios New York City, July 12, 1937.

Master 011303-1:

1. **Whispers In The Dark** (Holländer/Robin)
2. **Don't Ever Change** (Hirsch/Handman) vocal Peg LaCentra
3. **If I Put My Heart In A Song** (Coslow/Siegel)
4. **Love Is A Merry-Go-Round** (Bloom/Mercer)

Master 011304-1:

5. **Till The Clock Strikes Three** (Hill)
6. **The Moon Got In My Eyes** (Burke/Johnston) vocal Peg LaCentra
7. **All You Want To Do Is Dance** (Burke/Johnston) vocal Peg LaCentra
8. **It's The Natural Thing To Do** (Burke/Johnston) vocal Peg LaCentra

Master 011305-1:

9. **The Folks Who Live On The Hill** (Kern/Hammerstein II) vocal Peg LaCentra
10. **Can I Forget You?** (Kern/Hammerstein II) vocal Peg LaCentra
11. **The Things I Want** (Kern/Hammerstein II) vocal Peg LaCentra
12. **Posin'** (Chaplin/Cahn)

Master 011306-1:

13. **If You Ever Should Leave** (Chaplin/Cahn) vocal Peg LaCentra
14. **The Loveliness Of You** (Gordon/Revel)
15. **Afraid To Dream** (Gordon/Revel) vocal Peg LaCentra
16. **All Alone** (Berlin)

Master 011307-1:

17. **Because I Love You** (Berlin)
18. **If I Had You** (Shapiro/Campbell/Connelly)
19. **Together** (DeSylva /Brown/Henderson)
20. **Just You, Just Me** (Klages/Greer)

CD Two

Artie Shaw clarinet; Max Kaminsky, Chuck Peterson, Tom DiCarlo trumpets; George Arus, Harry Rodgers trombones; Les Robinson, Hank Freeman altos; Tony Pastor vocal/tenor; Fred Petry tenor; Les Burness piano; Al Avola guitar; Ben Ginsberg bass; Cliff Leeman drums; Dolores O'Neill vocal. RCA Studios New York City, October 17, 1937.

Master 015507-1:

1. **A Strange Loneliness** (Mysels/Burke) vocal Dolores O'Neill
2. **Have You Met Miss Jones?** (Rodgers/Hart) vocal Tony Pastor
3. **I'd Rather Be Right** (Rodgers/Hart)
4. **Everything You Said Came True** (Franklin/Friend)

Master 015508-1:

5. **Rosalie** (Porter) vocal Tony Pastor
6. **You Have Everything** (Schwartz/Dietz)
7. **Shindig** (Shaw)
8. **I've A Strange New Rhythm In My Heart** (Porter)

Master 015509-1:

9. **Sweet Varsity Sue** (Lewis/Tobias) vocal Tony Pastor
10. **I Want A New Romance** (Lane/Coslow)
11. **Shoot The Likker To Me, John Boy** (Shaw)
12. **Free Wheeling** (Shaw)

Master 015510-1:m

13. **S.O.S.** (Shaw)
14. **How Dry I Am** (traditional)
15. **Black And Blue** (Waller/Razaf) vocal Tony Pastor
16. **Fee Fi Fo Fum** (Shaw/Avola)

Mster 015511-1:

17. **I'm Yours** (Green/Harburg)
18. **Sweet Adeline** (Armstrong/Gerard) vocal Tony Pastor
19. **Old Black Joe** (Foster)
20. **It's A Long Way To Tipperary** (Judge/Williams)

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